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REVIEWS

RECENT TEXTS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH

It was in the nineties—that dark, backward, and abysm of time—that the writer of this article began to teach English, and began to hunt for a good textbook in composition. The teaching and quest have continued to this day, and both are still infinitely interesting. In that dim time one could choose between three or four composition texts, or rather between three or four college professors. Professor Harvard had a book; so had Professor Cornell and Professor Amherst. To go from one of these books to another was as gentle a transition as the change from the blue bed to the brown—and almost as sleep-provoking. For all of those dear old college professors had read their Quintilian, and they set forth his teachings in the best collegiate style. That the preparatory schools managed to send up to college some very good English students even in those days is proof that a good teacher can triumph over any textbook.

But we have changed all that. A quarter of a century has made a marvelous change in our composition texts for high schools. For one thing, they are now nearly all written by high-school or normal-school teachers—persons who are in the trenches, digging desperately to save the English language from destruction. These people have made books to suit their need, with the result that we have better—far better—texts than we ever had before. Men like Hitchcock, Hosic, and Ward have placed the English teachers of the country under a great debt of gratitude.

A second change in this matter of composition texts is the tendency to make books for special types of schools. The commercial high school in particular demands its text in business English, and the publishers, who really appear to have both ears on the ground, have been most ready to meet the demand. This article will deal with four of these recent books: Miles's *English in Business* (Ronald Press), Opdycke's *English of Commerce* (Scribner's), Cook's *Project Book in Business English* (Holt), and Hatfield's *Business English Projects* (Macmillan).

The first problem that arises is the definition, for textbook purposes, of the term "Business English." Does it mean the accepted principles of composition plus the application of these to business situations? Or

should such a book presuppose a knowledge of the principles of composition, and concentrate upon business letters, sales talks, and advertising? This is surely an important question. To it these books give different answers. Dr. Miles and Mr. Opdycke and Mr. Hatfield give us books which combine the standard rhetoric and business English; Miss Cook swings boldly into mid-channel with "Business English Only" flying at the peak of her trim little craft.

Again, is business English to be taught to babes and sucklings in the first year of high school, and continued throughout, or is it a mystery reserved for the later years? Again our answers differ. Mr. Hatfield's book is frankly for the first two years of the course; Miss Cook's is for the last two years; Dr. Miles and Mr. Opdycke present a four-year course. You pays your money and you takes your book.

And now to consider each of these books more curiously. Miles's *English in Business* is decidedly the most scholarly book of the four. In plan it is based upon some of the most recent investigations of English problems; its illustrative material is drawn from the best business practice of today. Its style is clear, but somewhat academic: one is always conscious that a teacher, a very dignified teacher, is speaking. Sometimes this teacher is a bit dogmatic, as when he says (p. 34) that *therefore* can never properly be introduced to connect parts of a sentence. Would he rule out a sentence like this, from the *Spectator*: "He blushes, therefore he is guilty"? The chapters on the "Newspaper" and on "Sales Letters" are particularly good. The exercises that follow each special topic are well within the powers of pupils, and are mercifully brief. Typographically, the book is a model.

Opdycke's *English of Commerce* is by far the largest book of the four. If there is any conceivable form of business English not included here, the reviewer has failed to note it. There are directions for deep breathing, a complete house lease, and a form for one's last will and testament. There is even the solemn injunction to beware of using archaisms. Did anyone ever hear of a high-school pupil who had to be operated upon for archaisms? But somewhere in the dialogues of Quintilian there is a passage like this:

Magister: And finally, never employ archaisms.

Puer: What are they, master?

Magister: Words of which you never heard. Promise me that you will never use them.

Puer: That I will not, master.

And so the precept has rolled down the ages.

To return to the English of Commerce, it may be summed up in the statement that it is a book in the first stage. In making a good textbook there are three steps: the first is to collect a mass of material; the second is to select and reject until only the best remains; the third is to organize this material into teachable form. This book stops at the first stage.

The two remaining books are evidence of the firm hold the project method has taken in the minds of English teachers. Miss Cook's *Project Book in Business English* might be called a Book of Ideas. It is the freshest in treatment, and the most individual in its emphasis of all the four. The opening chapter is entitled "The Business of Going to School"; it establishes a new viewpoint for the pupil, and one that is fruitful of results. Other chapter headings, such as "The Imagination in Business" and "The Positive Attitude of Mind," show how far the author has gotten away from Quintilian. The book is evidently one that has grown out of the classroom practice of a successful teacher. It is unequal in treatment, however, the section on salesmanship being quite inadequate. The chapter on the "Business Student's Reading" contains an excellent seven-page classified list of books for outside reading, and an ingenious plan for reporting on them. The book is one that a teacher of any kind of English will find stimulating and suggestive.

In *Business English Projects* Mr. Hatfield has given us a textbook that stands out from most others in being written straight at the pupil. We all know the book that is written at the teacher and only occasionally condescends to notice the poor pupil standing in a corner; we know, too, the book that seems to be written at the reviewer. Hatfield's book, from beginning to end, aims straight at the boy—and usually hits him. It is different in method from any of the others. While it contains sections on sentence unity and punctuation and the like, these are not to be studied by themselves. The first part of the book is full of projects for oral and written compositions. Then, after the interest has been aroused by the project, and the composition written, there are suggestions for revision in which the author slyly intimates that back on page 79 there is something that will give you just the help you need. Now, will this method work? Will a boy learn the proper use of *who* and *whom* better when he has just written something that contains a number of *who's*? If you believe that he will, you ought to try Mr. Hatfield's book with your first-year boys, even if they happen to be girls.

Taken together, these four books show clearly that the commercial schools demand a textbook in composition of a different type from that used in the academic schools. They show, too, that there is yet no general agreement as to what that book shall contain. But the very points of difference of these texts are matter for rejoicing, for by the test of use we shall come to know, in a few years, which type is best. And by that time we shall, perchance, have texts with such titles as, "Rhetoric for Airplane Pilots," and "Formal Composition for Owners of Fords." Then it will be time to get back to Quintilian.

BENJAMIN A. HEYDRICK

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BOOK NOTICES

[Mention under this head does not preclude review elsewhere]

Vital Forces in Current Events. Readings on present-day affairs from contemporary leaders and thinkers. Edited by MORRIS EDMUND SPEARE and WALTER BLAKE NORRIS. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1920. Pp. 284.

A welcome addition to the growing supply of material for modernizing the English course. Suitable for twelfth year.

Sherwood or Robin Hood and the Three Kings. A play in five acts. By ALFRED NOYES. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1921. Pp. 205. \$1.75.

By means of brackets the omissions desirable in staging are indicated, yet the full text is presented. Practical directions for production are furnished by J. Milnor Dorey. This is one of the few poetic plays successfully presented by high schools.

The Voice of Science in Nineteenth Century Literature. Representative prose and verse. Selected and arranged by ROBERT EMMONS ROGERS. With an introduction by HENRY GREENLEAF PEARSON. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921. Pp. 328.

Selections from Arnold, Huxley, Ruskin, Swinburne, Browning, Emerson, Whitman, and others.

Evelina. By FRANCES BURNET D'ARBLAY. Edited by EDWIN BJORKMAN. New York: Gregg Publishing Co., 1920. Pp. 569.

Tales from Birdland. By T. GILBERT PEARSON. Illustrations by CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Page & Co., 1920. Pp. 237.

A supplementary reader by the secretary of the Audubon Society. Neither soporific nor sentimental.

Milton—Poetry and Prose. With essays by JOHNSON, HAZLITT, MACAULAY. With an introduction by A. M. D. HUGHES and notes by various scholars. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920. Pp. 224.